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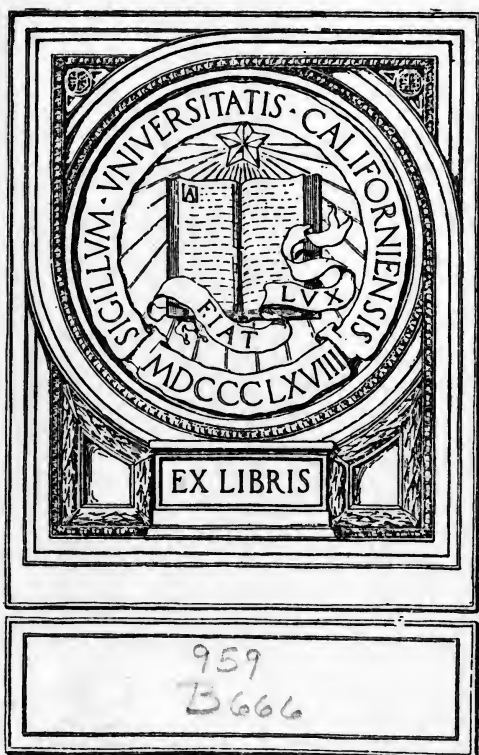


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INTRODUCING IRONY

Maxwell Bodenheim

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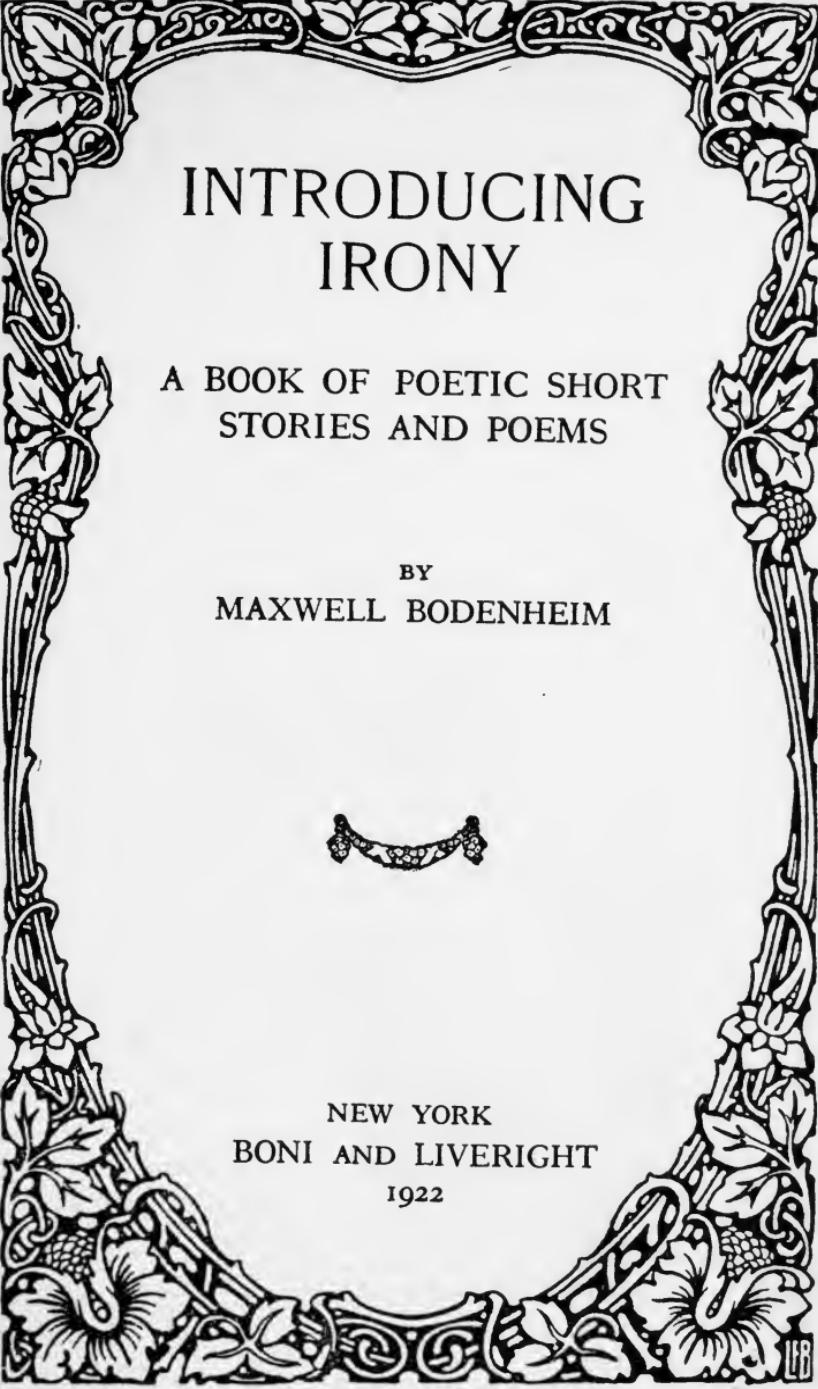


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INTRODUCING IRONY




INTRODUCING
IRONY

A BOOK OF POETIC SHORT
STORIES AND POEMS

BY
MAXWELL BODENHEIM



NEW YORK
BONI AND LIVERIGHT
1922

A small, stylized logo or monogram, likely the publisher's mark, located in the bottom right corner of the decorative border.

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To

FEDYA RAMSAY

WHOSE HAND NEVER LEAVES MY SHOULDER

468543

Some of the poems and stories in this book have appeared in *The Dial*, *Harper's Bazar*, *The Little Review*, *The Nation*, *Cartoons Magazine*, *Poetry*, *A Magazine of Verse*, *The New York Globe*, *The Bookman*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Measure* and *The Double Dealer*

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JACK ROSE

WITH crafty brooding life turned to Jack Rose
And made him heroin-peddler, and his pose
Was sullenly reflective since he feared
That life, regarding him, had merely jeered.
His vanity was small and could not call
His egoism to the dubious hall
Of fame, where average artists spend their hour.
Doubting his powers he was forced to cower
Within the shrill, damp alleys of his time,
Immersed in that brisk midnight known as crime.
He shunned the fiercely shrewd stuff that he sold
To other people, and derived a cold
Enjoyment from the writhing of their hearts.
A speechless artist, he admired the arts
Of blundering destruction, like a monk
Viewing a play that made him mildly drunk.
And so malicious and ascetic Jack
Bent to his trade with a relentless back
Until he tapped an unexpected smile —
A woman's smile as smooth and hard as tile.
May Bulger pawned her flesh to him and gave
His heroin to her brother, with a grave
Reluctance fumbling at her painted lips.
Though angry at herself, she took the whips
Of undesired love, to quiet a boy
Who wept inanely for his favorite toy.
She hated Jack because he failed to gloss
And soften the rough surface of her loss,
His matter-of-fact frown biting at her heart.
He hated her because her smiling guess
Had robbed him of ascetic loneliness,

And when her brother died, Jack sat beside
Her grief and played a mouth-harp while she cried.
But when she raised her head and smiled at him —
A smile intensely stripped and subtly grim —
His hate felt overawed and in a trap,
And suddenly his head fell to her lap.
For some time she sat stiffly in the chair,
Then slowly raised her hand and stroked his hair.

SEAWEED FROM MARS

I

“**H**AVE you ever played on a violin
Larger than ten thousand stars
And warmer than what you call sin?”
Torban, a young man from Mars,
Gave me the stretch of his voice,
And my “no” fell down like a pin
On the echoed din of his words.
He said: “Then I have no choice.
I must use the barrenly involved
Words with which you have not solved
The wistful riddles of your days.
Leave the pale and ruddy herds
Of men, with their surrendering ways,
And come with me to Mars.”

II

DRUMS of Autumn beat on Mars,
Calling our minds to reunion.
The avenues of seaweed spars
Have attained a paleness
Equal to that of earthly philosophies,
And the trees have lost
The diamond violence of Spring.
Their purple leaves have turned to grey
Just as a human religion
Gradually changes to pretence.
In Mars we have only two seasons,
Spring and Autumn — their reasons
Rest in a treacherous sun
That suddenly runs away,

Creating a twilight-suspense.
When the sun reappears
Mars is once more amazed
By the blazing flatteries of Spring.
Again the heavy leaves ring
With odor and light deftly pressed
Into a stormy chorus.
Then we abandon the screaming violins
Of our minds, and each man wins
An understanding rest.
Once more we roam and jest
Upon the avenues, with voices
One shade louder than the leaves,
Or sail upon the choral seas
And trade our words with molten ease.
Throughout the Autumn we stand
Still and deserted, while our minds
Leap into sweeping tensions
Blending sound and form
Into one search across the universe.

III

WHAT do we find in this search?
All of your earthly words lurch
Feebly upon the outskirts of my mind,
And when they pass beyond them, they are blind.
Outward forms are but the graves
Of sound, and all the different waves
Of light and odor, they are sound
That floats unshaped and loosely gowned.
When sound is broken into parts
Your ears receive the smaller arts,
But when it drifts in broad release
You cannot hear its louder peace.

Your houses, hills, and flesh of red
Are shapes of sound, asleep or dead.
In Mars a stronger Spring of sound
Revives our forms and makes Profound
Music, softer than the dins
That rose from Autumn violins.
Our minds, whose tense excursions spread
In chase of noisy walls that fled,
Relent and drop within our heads,
Enjoying the timid sound of their beds.
Filled with a gracious weariness,
We place it, like a lighter dress,
Upon the sounds from other stars
Brought back to celebrate on Mars.

IV

A GIRL of Mars is burning
Notes of thought within her throat.
Her pale white lips are turning
The fire to storied chords.
The song is old but often made
By girls who sit in Spring and braid
The lanterned language of their hair.
Its spacious gaiety cannot be sold
To your narrow glow of words.
The hint that I shall give is cold
And like the sound of snowy air.

*I shall journey with the men
When my curling thoughts are ten.
O the sternness of that number!
Colored sounds from breath to umber
Promising a first release.
I have dwelt too long in peace*

*Placing smallness on my breast.
The prisoned whisper of my skin
Longs to vanish in the din
Of Autumn when great sounds are caught.
Let the tall wildness of my thought
Stride beside the thundering grace
Of the man whose spring-time face
Brought me tiny notes of rest.*

She sits within a house of stone
That lends a wise and balanced tone:
A roofless house whose walls are low
And level with her head's grey glow.
The bright sounds of her parents fly
Around the house — we do not die
In Mars, but change to gleams of sounds
And stay within our gayer rounds
Until when tired Spring has gone
We lead the Autumn searchers on.
Before we change, our bodies curve
Like yours save that our skins are gray:
Light shades of gray that almost swerve
To white, like earthly men who pray.

V

WE do not love and hate in Mars.
These earthly cries are flashing bars
Of sound from which our minds are free.
They stand in our mythology:
Legends elusive and weird,
Acrid Gods that once were feared.
They vanished imperceptibly
And none among us can agree

Upon the tangled way in which they fled.
Starlit symbols of dread,
They slowly exhausted themselves and died
In striding heralds of a wilder bride.
We have no emotions in Mars.
They are like long-healed wounds
Whose scars are softened by the gleam of our minds.
We approach them with clearer kinds
Of sound from deeply resting thought.
Our youths and maidens have not caught
The treacherous and tightly bound
Confusion of your loving sound,
For sex to us is but the ring
Of different shades of thought in Spring
When men recline upon the breast
Of women, dissolving into thoughtful rest.
In Autumn sex is left behind.
Men and women no longer lined
By different bodies raise their dins
Above the screaming violins.

TURMOIL IN A MORGUE

NEGRO,
Chinaman,
White servant-girl,
Russian woman,
Are learning how to be dead,
Aided by the impersonal boredom
Of a morgue at evening.
The morgue divides its whole
Of dead mens' contacts into four
Parts, and places one in each
Of these four bodies waiting for the carts.
The frankness of their decay
Breaks into contradictory symbols
And sits erect upon the wooden tables,
Thus cancelling the validity of time.
In a voice as passive as slime
The negro speaks.
"Killed a woman: ripped her skin.
Saw her heart floating in a tumbler of gin.
Had to drink her heart because it wouldn't leave the gin.
Because I wanted to reach all of her
They ripped my flesh.
They wanted to reach all of me
And their excuse was better than mine."
Cowed baby painted black,
The negro sits upon fundamentals
And troubles them a little with his hands.
The beautiful insanity
Of his eyes rebukes
The common void of his face.
Then the Chinaman speaks
In a voice whose tones are brass
From which emotion has been extracted.

"Loved a woman: she was white.
Her man blew my brains out into the night.
Hatred is afraid of color.
Color is the holiday
Given to moods of understanding:
Hatred does not understand.
When stillness ends the fever of ideas
Hatred will be a scarcely remembered spark."
Manikin at peace
With the matchless deceit of a planet,
The Chinaman fashions his placid immensity.
The Chinaman chides his insignificance
With a more impressive rapture
Than that of western midgets.
His rapture provides an excellent light
For the silhouette of the negro's curse.
Then the white servant-girl
Speaks in a voice whose syllables
Fall like dripping flower-juice and offal,
Both producing a similar sound.
"I made a neat rug for a man.
He cleaned his feet on me and I liked
The tired, scheming way in which he did it.
When he finished he decided
That he needed a smoother texture,
And found another lady.
I killed myself because I couldn't rub out
The cunning marks that he left behind."
Impulsive doll made of rubbish
On which a spark descended and ended,
The white servant-girl, without question or answer,
Accepts the jest of a universe.
Then the Russian woman
Speaks in a voice that is heat
Ill-at-ease upon its couch of sound.

" I married a man because
His lips tormented my melancholy
And made it long to be meek,
And because, when he walked to his office each morning,
He thought himself a kindled devil
Enduring the smaller figures around him.
He abandoned me for German intrigue
And I chased him in other men,
Never quite designing him.
Death, a better megalomaniac,
Relieved me of the pursuit."
Symbol of earth delighted
With the vibration of its nerves,
The Russian woman sunders life
Into amusing deities of emotion
And bestows a hurried worship.
Then the morgue, attended by a whim,
Slays the intonations of their trance
And slips these people back to life.
The air is cut by transformation.
The white servant-girl retreats to a corner
With a shriek, while the negro advances,
And the Russian woman
Nervously objects to the Chinaman's question.
The morgue, weary housewife for speechless decay,
Spends its helplessness in gay revenge:
Revenge of earth upon four manikins
Who straightened up on wooden tables
And betrayed her.

CONDENSED NOVEL

SHUN the abundant paragraphs
With which a novelist interviews shades
Of physical appearance in one man,
And regard the body of Alvin Spar
Curtained by more aristocratic words.
"Alvin Spar in adolescence
Was neither slim nor rotund,
But slightly aware of future corpulence.
The face that Aristotle may have had
Was interfering, bit by bit,
With an outer face of pouting curves.
Alvin Spar in youth
Held half of the face that Aristotle
May have had, and the pungent directness
Of a stable-boy.
Alvin Spar in middle age
Had the face that Aristotle
May have had — a large austerity
Disputing the bloom of well-selected emotions.
Straight nose, thick lips, low forehead
Were apprentices to the austerity
That often stepped beyond them.
Alvin Spar in old age
Had drawn the wrinkled bed-quilts
Over the face that Aristotle
May have had, but his eyes peered out,
Fighting with sleep."
Shuffle the cards on which I have written
Alvin Spar's changes in physical appearance,
And deal them out to the various players.
Accident first, then the qualities of the players —
These two will struggle to dominate
The movements of the plot.

The plot of this novel will ascend
In twenty lines and escape
The honoured adulteration so dear to men.
"Alvin Spar loved a woman
Who poured acid on his slumber
By showing him the different fools within him.
Sincerely longing for wisdom
He married her, while she desired
A pupil whom she could lazily beat.
She convinced him that emotions
Were simply periods of indecision
Within the mind, and with emphasis
He walked to another woman.
The second woman loved him,
But she was merely to him
Clay for mental sculpture.
She killed herself, believing
That he might become to her in death
A figure less remote and careful.
He forgot her in an hour
And used the rest of his life
In finding women over whom he could tower. . . .
He died while madly straying over his heights."
The incidental people, chatter, and background?
You will find them between
Pages one and four-hundred
Of the latest bulk in prose.

MANNERS

GINGERLY, the poets sit.
Gingerly, they spend
The adjectives of dribbling flatteries,
With here and there a laceration
Feeding on the poison of a smile.
In the home of the poet-host
That bears the slants of a commonplace,
Eagerly distributed —
The accepted lyrical note —
The poets sit.
The poets drink much wine
And tug a little at their garments,
Weighing the advantages of disrobing.
(It is necessary to call them "poets"
Since, according to custom,
Titles are generously given to the attempt.)
Sirona, cousin of the poet-host,
Munches at the feast of words.
She endeavors to convince herself
That her hunger has become an illusion.
The poets, capitulating to wine,
Leave their birds and twilights,
Their trees and cattle at evening,
And study Sirona's body —
Their manacled hands still joined
By the last half-broken link.
Beneath her ill-fitting worship
Young Sirona fears
That the poets are wordy animals
Circled by brocaded corsets. . . .
Sirona, if you stood on your head
Now, and waved the brave plan of your legs,
Undisturbed by cloth,

The poets would be convinced
That you were either insane or angling.
But an exceptional poet,
Never present at these parties,
Would compliment your vigour
And scoff at the vain deceptions of privacy.
Vulgarity, Sirona, is often a word
Invented by certain men to defend
Their disdain for other men, who chuckle
At the skulking tyrannies of fashion.
Few men, Sirona, dare to become
Completely vulgar, but many
Nibble at the fringes.

AN ACROBAT, A VIOLINIST, AND A CHAMBERMAID CELEBRATE

GEOMETRY of souls.
Dispute the roundness of gesturing flesh;
Angles, and oblongs, and squares
Slip with astounding precision
Into the throes of lifted elbows;
Into the searching perpendicular
Of fingers rising to more than ten;
Into the salient straightness of lips;
Into the rock-like protest of knees.
The flesh of human beings
Is a beginner's-lesson in mathematics.
The pliant stupidity of flesh
Mentions the bungling effort
Of a novice to understand
The concealed mathematics of the soul.
Men will tell you that an arm
Rising to the sky
Indicates strident emotion;
Reveals a scream of authority;
Expresses the longing of a red engine
Known as the heart;
Rises like a flag-pole
From which the mind signals.
Men will fail to tell you
That an arm rising to the sky
Takes a straight line of the soul
And strives to comprehend it;
That the arm is a solid tunnel
For a significance that shoots beyond it.
The squares, and angles, and oblongs of the soul,
The commencing lines of the soul
Are pestered by a debris of words.

Men shovel away the words:
Falteringly in youth;
Tamely and pompously in middle age;
Vigorously in old age.
Death takes the last shovel-full away:
Death is accommodating.
Nothing is wise except outline.
The content held by outline
Is a slave in the mass.
Men with few outlines in their minds
Try to give the outlines dignity
By moulding them into towers two inches high,
In which they sit in lonely, talkative importance.
Men with many outlines
Break them into more, and thus
Playing, come with quickened breath
To hints of spiritual contours.
Seek only the decoration;
Avoid the embryonic yelping
Of argument, and scan your patterns
For angles, oblongs, and squares of the soul.
I overheard this concentrated prelude
While listening to an acrobat, a violinist, and a chamber-
maid
Celebrate the removal of their flesh.
While playing, the violinist's upper arm
Bisected the middle of the acrobat's head
As the latter knelt to hear,
And the chambermaid
Stretched straight on the floor, with her forehead
Touching the tips of the violinist's feet.
Motion knelt to receive
The counselling touch of sound,
And vigour, in a searching line,
Reclined at the feet of sound,

Buying a liquid release.
Angles of arms and straight line of bodies
Made a decoration.
The violinist's music
Fell upon this decoration;
Erased the vague embellishment of flesh;
And came to angles, squares, and oblongs
Of the soul.

NOVEL CONVERSATION

CERTAIN favorite words of men have gathered in a vale made of sound-waves. These words, far removed from human tongues and impositions, enjoy an hour of freedom.

Emotion

Men believe that I can speak
Without the aid of thought.
True, I have murdered many kings,
Leaned upon many cheeks,
And sought the release of music,
But when I ride upon words
I am forced to steal them from the mind.
Forgive me, now, if a trace of thought
Invades my liquid purity!

Truth

You need not defend your argument
With meek verbosity,
As though you dreaded its possible subtleties.
We are not men, but words!
Men have made me a lofty acrobat
Entertaining each of their desires
With some old twist on the bars.
But let us leave the frantic tasks
Forced upon us by men.
This is our grove of rest.

Intellect

Emotion, we have often crept
From our separate palaces,
Asking each other for secret favors.

Emotion

We laughed because the men who made us
Could not see our desperate trading.
We will end our laugh
Upon the dust of the last man on earth
And taste a peaceful strangeness.

Art

And I, the tortured child of your love,
Will slip from the fringe of your grayness
Into the void from which I came.

Poetry

And I, the moment when your arms
Touched each other in the night,
Will no longer strive
To tell the happening to men.

Fantasy

And I, the glistening whim
Of your secret love,
Will change to a question lurking within your dust.

Suggestion

And I, the beckoning second
When you curved a world in the twist of your
fingers —
I shall vanish into your completeness.

Intellect

The hope of this magic ending
Is our only consolation.
Emotion, a new philosopher
Is forging blades for your torture,
And a braggart poet
Invites me to his disdain.
Let us return to our burdens.

THE SCRUB-WOMAN

(*A Sentimental Poem*)

TIME has placed his careful insult
Upon your body.
In other ages Time gave rags
To hags without riches, but now he brings
Cotton, calico, and muslin —
Tokens of his admiration
For broken backs.
Neat nonsense, stamped with checks and stripes,
Fondles the deeply marked sneer
That Time has dropped upon you.
While Time, in one of his well-debated moods
That men call an age, is attending to his manners,
I shall scan the invisible banners
Of meaning that unfurl when you move.

II

WHEN you open your mouths
I see a well, and strangled chastity
At the bottom — not chastity
Of the flesh, but lucid purity
Of the mind choked by a design
Of filth that has slowly turned cold,
Like a sewer intruding
Upon a small, dead face.
This is not repulsive.
Only things alive, with gaudy hollows,
Can repulse, but your death holds
A haggard candour that gently thrusts its way
Into the unimportance of facts.
You are not old: you were never young.

Life caressed your senses
With a heavy sterility,
And you thanked him with the remnant
Of thought that he left behind —
His usual moment of absentminded kindness.
When the muscles of your arm
Punish the brush that rubs upon wood
I see a rollicking mockery —
Rhythm in starved pursuit
Of petrified desire.
When the palms of your hands
Stay flat in dirty water
I can observe your emotions
Welcome refuse as perfume,
Intent upon a last ghastly deception.
When you grunt and touch your hair
I perceive your exhaustion
Reaching for a bit of pity
And carefully rearranging it.

Lift up your pails and go home;
Take the false tenderness of rest;
Drop your clothes, disordered, on the floor.
Vindictive simplicity.

MEDITATIONS IN A CEMETERY

You can write nothing new about death

GEROID LATOUR

DEATH,
Grandiosely hackneyed subject,
I live in a house one hundred years old
Placed in the middle of a cemetery.
The cemetery is bothered by mausoleums
Where fragments of Greek and Gothic
Lie in orderly shame.
Slabs and crosses of stone
Remain unacquainted with the bones
That they must strive to introduce.
The trees retain their guiltless sibilants.
The trees tell me upon my morning walk:
"In other cemeteries,
Shakespeare, Maeterlinck and Shaw
Fail to produce the slightest awe
In trees that do not create for an audience."
Being finalities, the grass and trees
Find no need for rules of etiquette.
Delicacy must be effortless
Or else it changes to a patched-up dress.
But delicate and coarse are words
For quickness that tries to linger,
And slowness that strives to be fast!
Emotions and thoughts are merely
The improvisations of motion,
And lack a permanent content.
An aging tree is wiser
Than an aging poet,
And death is wiser than both.
The scale ascends out of sight
And I recall that the morning is light

And smaller notes await me.
The tomb-stones around my path
Have been crisply visited by names
To which they bear no relation.
Imagine the perturbation
Of a stone removed
From the comprehension of a mountain
And branded with the name of A. Rozinsky!
Recollecting journeys of my own,
I close my eyes and leave the stone.
The names of other men entreat —
Slight variations in line
Ponderously refusing to resign.
Men who will be forgotten
Try to hinder the process with stone.
Because they dread the affirmation
Of ashes undiscovered in wind,
I am walking through this cemetery.

The old grave-diggers will soon
Astonish the earth below this oak.
From their faces adjectives have fled,
Leaving the essential noun:
Leaving also the unwilling frown
With which they parley with the earth . . .
Death, I must tell you of these things
Since you are unaware that they exist.
You send an efficient servant
To the almost unseen fluctuations
Of tomb-stones, skulls, and lilies,
Reserving your eyes for larger games.

SIMPLE ACCOUNT OF A POET'S LIFE

IN 1892

When literature and art in America
Presented a mildewed but decorous mien,
He was born.
During the first months of his life
His senses had not yet learned to endure
The majestic babble of old sterilities.
The vacuum of his brain
Felt a noisy thinness outside,
Which it could not hear or see,
And gave it the heavier substance
Of yells that were really creation
Fighting its way to form.
(When babies shriek they seek
Power in thought and action.
Life objects to their intent
And forces their voices to repent.)
At the age of four he lived inwardly,
With enormous shapeless emotions
Taking his limbs, like waves.
His mind was vapour censured
By an occasional protest
That mumbled and could not be heard.
People to him were headless figures —
Bodies surmounted by voices
That tickled like feathers, or struck like rocks.
Missiles thrown from moving mountain-tops
And leaving only resentment at their touch.
At ten the voices receded
To invisible meanings
That toyed with flesh-protected secrets of faces.

The voices made promises
Which the faces continually evaded,
And often the voices in vengeance
Changed a lip or an eye-brow
To repeat their neglected demands.
When swung to him the voices
Were insolent enigmas,
Tripping him as he stood
Midway between fright and indifference.
He sometimes tittered tranquilly
At the obvious absurdity of this.
His rages were false and sprang
From aloof thoughts chanting over their chains.
The immediate cause of each rage
Merely opened a door
Upon this changeless inner condition.
That species of intoxicated thought
Which men describe as emotion
Used its merriment to blind his eye-sight.
But anger, whose real roots are in the mind,
Tendered him times of hot perception.
He noticed that children held flexible flesh
That wisely sought a variety of patterns —
Flesh intent upon correcting
Its closeted effect —
While older people enticed their flesh
Into erect and formal lies
Repeated until their patience died
And they tried an unpracticed rebellion.
This was a formless revelation,
Unattended by words
But throwing its indistinct contrast
Over his broad one-colored thought.
At sixteen he employed words
To flay the contrast into shapes.

At seventeen he decided
To emulate the gay wisdom of children's flesh.
He deliberately borrowed whiskey
To wipe away the lessons of older people
Lest they intrude their sterility
Upon his plotting exuberance.
He placed his hands on women,
Gently, boldly, as one
Experimenting with a piano.
He stole money, begged on street-corners,
And answered people with an actual knife
Merely to give his thoughts and emotions
A changing reason for existence.
Moderation seemed to him
A figure half asleep and half awake
And mutilating the truth of each condition.
At twenty-four his flesh became tired,
And to amuse the weariness
His hands wrote poetry.
He had done this before,
But only as a gleeful reprimand
To the speed of his limbs.
Now he wrote with the motives of one
Whose flesh is passing into less visible manners.
At times he returned to more concrete motions,
To befriend the handmaiden of his flesh,
But gradually he longed
For the complete secrecy of written creation,
Enjoying the novelty of a hiding-place.
In 1962
He died with a grin at the fact
That literature and art in America
Were still presenting a mildewed, decorous mien.

CANDID NARRATIVE

I

A chorus-girl falls asleep and, in a dream, speaks to a former lover. In her dream she holds the intelligence of a poet but still clings to certain of the qualities and mannerisms of her wakeful self.

SAY, kid, I'm in a candid mood;
The kind of mood that silences
The babbling dampness of my character.
I'm feeling as improbable
As an overworked Grecian myth
Fainting amid the smells of a Ghetto.
Now, Hypocrisy
Always slinks along
Winking an opaque eye at reality.
But when he spies a fantasy
He feels disgraced and leaves in haste.
What's the use of telling a lie to a lie?
So, since I'm only a dream,
Listen to my candid scream.
You like to press a rouged cheek
Against your obscurity,
Like a third-rate poet
Pasting a sunset upon his emptiness.
Bashful mountebanks like you
Can seduce the eloquent delusion
Of time and give it a speechless limp.
The insincere trickle of your words
Was neither silence nor sound
But falteringly tempted both,
Like a tiny fountain unnoticed
At the feet of two large coquettes

The intricate laziness
Of your dimpled face
Received a petulantly naked
Ghost of thought, and seized it without desire.
Again it held the furbished effigies
Of sensuality
And tried to give them life
From the weariness of my face.
Yet I could have endured you
But for the fact that your moustache
Scraped across my lips
Like a clumsy imitation of passion.
Trivial insults have tumbled down
The pillared complacency of empires
Just as the thrust of your lips
Tripped my mercenary balance.
My lover now has the face of a dog,
With each corner of his lips
Pointing to a different Heaven,
Yet his greed and melancholy
Sometimes fondle each other
Upon the pressures of his mouth,
And the monotony of his kiss
Does not dissolve my stoicism.
Women who measure their gifts for lovers
Never hope for more than this.

II

UNLITERARY AND SHAMELESS

*A young woman who has been renounced by her lover,
because of her lack of culture, answers his derision.*

YOUR cloistered naughtiness
 Makes me as boisterous
 As a savage attending
 A minstrel-show of regrets.
 The pampered carefulness
 With which you distil a series
 Of standardized perfumes from life
 Takes its promenade
 Between the realms of sanity and madness.
 You are too precise to be quite sane
 And too evasive to be insane,
 And all that you have left me
 Is a mood of windy sadness —
 Emotions becoming verbose
 In a last thin effort
 To persuade themselves that they loved
 A jewel that slipped from your fingers.
 Your mind is a limpid warehouse
 Filled with other mens' creations,
 And you pilfer a bit from each,
 Disguising the scheme of your culture.
 I would rather be a naked fool
 Than a full-gowned erudite
 Imitation of other mens' hands.
 I shall marry a desperado
 And give him strength with which to paint
 Black angels and muscular contortions
 On panels of taffeta.

TWO SONNETS TO MY WIFE

I

BECAUSE her voice is Schönberg in a dream
In which his harshness plays with softer keys
This does not mean that it is void of ease
And cannot gather to a strolling gleam.
Her voice is full of manners and they seem
To place a masquerade on thought and tease
Its strength until it finds that it has knees,
And whimsically leaves its heavy scheme.

Discords can be the search of harmony
For worlds that lie beyond the reach of poise
And must be captured with abandoned hands.
The music of my wife strives to be free
And often takes a light, unbalanced voice
While madly walking over thoughtful lands.

II

MY wife relents to life and does not speak
Each moment with a deft and rapid note.
Sometimes a clumsy weirdness finds in her throat
And ushers in a music that is weak
And bargains with the groping of her heart.
But even then she plays with graver tones
That do not sell themselves to laughs and moans
But seek the counsel of a deeper art.

She drapes her loud emotions in a shroud
Of glistening thought that waves above their dance
And sometimes parts to show their startled eyes.
The depths of mind within her have not bowed
To sleek emotion with its amorous glance.
She slaps its face and laughs at its surprise!

FINALITIES

I

PRETEND that night is grandiose,
That stars win graves in every ditch;
Pretend that moon-light is verbose
And affable, like some grande-mère,
And men will say that your despair
Seduces luminous conceits,
Or call you an anaemic fool
Who stuffs himself with curdled sweets.
Thus sentenced to obscurity,
You can find more turbulent lips
And spaciouly retreat from men
Immersed in pedestals and whips.
Amusedly, you can say that stars
Are wizened jests on every ditch;
That moon-light is a trick that jars
Your mind intent on other minds.
Having agreed upon your station,
Men will no longer heed your words,
And with a galloping elation
You can contradict yourself in peace.

II

THE wary perturbations of convinced
And secretly disdainful men are mild
And deftly tepid to the ears of one
Who entertains a careless, ungloved child.
Above the sprightly idleness of plates
Men sit and feign industrious respect,
With eye-brows often slightly ill at ease —
Cats in an argument are more erect.

At last the tactful lustres of farewells
Are traded: each man strolls off and forgets
The other — not a frill is disarranged.
The tension dexterously avoids regrets.
Two men have unveiled carved finalities
And made apologies for the event,
With voices well-acquainted with a task
Devoid of nakedness and ornament.
And each man might have murmured, "Yes, I know
What you will say and what I shall reply,"
And each man might have watched the other man
Smile helplessly into his mutton-pie.

III

THIS farcical clock is copying
A wood-chopper with nimble poise,
While Time, with still and fluid strides,
Perplexedly listens to the noise.
The room that holds this joke is filled
With the relaxed complacencies
Of poets hiding from themselves
With measured trivialities.
But one among them walks about
And watches with embarrassed eyes.
The others do not speak to him:
His nudeness is a tight disguise.
This fool is anxious to display
Interrogations of his mind
To poets who at work and play
Are isolated from their kind.
Reluctantly he finds his room,
Sits on the floor, with legs tucked in,
And grins up at another clock
Aloofly measuring its din.

IV

WHEN you are tired of ogling moltenly,
 Your undertones explosively confess.
 A shop-girl coughing over her cigarette
 Expresses the burlesque of your distress.
 Take your cocaine. It leaves a blistering stain,
 But phantom diamonds are immune from greed.
 You pluck them from the buttons of your vest,
 Wildly apologising for your need.
 Take more. Redress the thinness of your neck
 With diamonds; entertain them with your breast;
 Cajole them on the floor with fingertips
 That cannot pause, dipped in a demon's zest.
 If you had not relented to a man
 Who meddled with your face and stole your clothes,
 Your shrill creative pleasures might be still
 Incarcerated in the usual pose.
 Hysteria shot its fist against your face
 One day, and left the blood-spot of your mouth,
 But when the morning strikes you there will be
 More than hysteria in your answering shout.

V

LAUGHTER is a skeleton's applause:
 Grief sells increase to sterility:
 Happiness protects its subtle flaws.
 These three significances make
 The part of you that men can see,
 As you recline upon this bed,
 Your hand defending one bare knee,
 Your shoulders trapped upon the quilt.
 But under the warm sophistry
 That turns your flesh, another form

Abstractly bellicose and free
Attacks the answer of your blood.
Freedom is the lowest note
Of slavery, and slavery
The lowest freedom — you can feel
The charm of your servility.
True, you were once a chamber-maid
Who won a thief and spoke to grief,
And now your limbs have numbly strayed.
Are these not harmless travesties?

VI

SNOBS have pockets into which
They crowd too many trinkets.
You feel this, talking to the rich
And lightly bulging mountebank.
Untie the knots that close your bag
And tempt him with a creed or need.
Be as loquacious as a hag
Who loves the details of her wares.
There is a relish when you speak
To one who cannot understand:
You celebrate upon a peak
And prod his helpless effigy.
This is an unimportant game
To men evading holidays,
But introspection becomes tame
Unless it compliments itself.
The lightly bulging mountebank
Is but an interval in which
You take your garments off and thank
The privacy that he bestows.

VII

LIKE other men you fly from adjectives.
The plain terseness that lives in verbs and nouns
Creates a panorama where you know
That men are not a cloud of romping clowns.
You greet the wideness of eternal curves
Where beauty, death and silence give their height
To those rare men who do not play with thought.
But this fruit-peddler decorates his fright
And polishes his peaches and his grapes
Insanely. If his mercenary hopes
Were bolder he would be a nimble poet.
Slight in her bridal gown, his mind elopes
With adjectives that find her incomplete:
Your mind is hard and massively parades
Across the earth with Homer and Villon.
Since each of you with common sense evades
Monotony, I join you and refuse
To call you dwarf or giant. Let the fools
Who criticise you bind you with these names
And separate your dead bones with their rules!

VIII

DEAD men sit down beside the telephones
Within your brain and carefully relate
Decisions and discretions of the past,
Convinced that they will not deteriorate.
But you have not their certainty: you try
A question now and then that cautiously
Assaults their whispered indolence until
Their sharp words once more force you to agree.
Then you insist that certain living men
Whose tones are half-discreet may be allowed

To greet their masters through the telephones,
Provided that their words are not too loud.
The new men imperceptibly entice
Their elders, and a compromise is made,
Both sides discovering that two or three
Excluded men must be correctly flayed.
And so the matter ends; conservative
And radical revise their family-tree,
While you report this happening with relief
To liberals and victorious cups of tea.

IMAGINARY PEOPLE

I

POET

YOU have escaped the comedy
Of swift, pretentious praise and blame,
And smashed a tavern where they sell
The harlots' wine that men call fame.
Heralds of reckless solitude
Have offered you another voice,
But men are still a tempting jest.
You roam and cannot make a choice.
When you have played distractedly
With a humility, you tire
And change the pastime to a pride.
These are but moods of one desire.
You throw an imitating gleam
Upon the dwarfs that line your road,
Then with a worn hostility
You tramp along beneath your load.

II

WOMAN

TO hide your isolation, you become
Tame and loquacious, bowing to the men
Who bring you ornaments and poverties.
Your cryptic melancholy dwindles then,
Solved by the distant contrast of your words.
Your loneliness, with an amused relief,
Sits listening to your volubility
And idling with an enervated grief.

The play does not begin until you say
Your last "good-night," for you have only made
A swindled fantasy regain its parts.
Throughout the night you held an unseen blade
Upon your lap and trifled with its hilt,
And now you lift it with submissive dread.
Should you attack your loneliness and grief
Now that they are asleep? You shake your head.

III

CHILD

LIKE puffs of smoke inquisitively blown
Across the slight transparency of dawn,
The births of thought disperse upon your face.
A tenuous arrogance, when they have gone,
Clings to its tiny wisdom and denies
The feeble challenge. Warm emotions swarm
Upon the flushed impatience of your face
And merge to lordly, evanescent form.
New sights bring light oppression to your mind.
You struggle with a hunger that transcends
The glistening indecisions of your eyes
And wins a flitting certainty. Your trends
Lead to a fabled turmoil that escapes
The stunted messengers of trembling thought.
Yet, when your hand for moments closes tight
You feel a dagger that your fears have caught.

IV

OLD MAN

BELOW your skull a social gathering glows.
Weak animosities exchange a last
Chat with emotional ambassadors
Who honor the importance of your past.
You turn your hammock and surrender limbs
To sunlight, and increase the hammock's swing
As though you suavely bargained with a friend.
Its answers are impersonal and bring
A tolerance that wounds your lack of strength.
A final insurrection cleaves your rest.
You raise your back, then lower it convinced
That motion now would be a needless test. . . .
And with your falling back, the gathering
Within your head melts through a door, chagrined,
And everything within you dies except
A blue and golden hammock in the wind.

UNEASY REFLECTIONS

DETERMINEDLY peppered with signs,
The omnibus ambles without curiosity.
Southampton Row, Malborne Road,

Charing Cross —

These names have no relation
To the buildings they partition
If one mutters, "I shall go to Euston Road,"
Imagination is relieved of all errands
And, decently ticketed, enters the omnibus.
If one muttered, "I shall go to protesting angles,
Surreptitiously middle-aged,
And find a reticent line to play with,"
One would violate
The hasty convenience of labels
And seriously examine one's destination.
If poplar-trees, brief violets and green glades
On any country road had each received
An incongruous name — Smith's Tree,
C. Jackson's Clump, or Ferguson's Depression —
And city streets had never known a label,
Most poets would have turned their fluid obsession
On lamp-posts and the grandeur of ash-cans.
It would be grimly realistic now
To write about a violet or a cow.

SUMMER EVENING: NEW YORK SUBWAY-STATION

PERSPIRING violence derides
The pathetic collapse of dirt.
An effervescence of noises
Depends upon cement for its madness.

Electric light is taut and dull,
Like a nauseated suspense.
This kind of heat is the recollection
Of an orgy in a swamp.
Soiled caskets joined together
Slide to rasping stand-stills.
People savagely tamper
With each other's bodies,
Scampering in and out of doorways.
Weighted with apathetic bales of people
The soiled caskets rattle on.
The scene consists of mosaics
Jerkily pieced together and blown apart.
A symbol of billowing torment,
This sturdy girl leans against an iron girder.
Weariness has loosened her face
With its shining cruelty.
Round and poverty-stricken
Her face renounces life.
Her white cotton waist is a wet skin on her breast:
Her black hat, crisp and delicate,
Does not understand her head.
An old man stoops beside her,
Sweat and wrinkles erupting
Upon the blunt remnants of his face.
A little black pot of a hat
Corrupts his grey-haired head.

Two figures on a subway-platform,
Pieced together by an old complaint.

GARBAGE-HEAP

THE wind was shrill and mercenary,
Like a housewife pacing down the sky.
Green weeds and tin-cans in the yard
Made a debris of ludicrous dissipations.
The ochre of cold elations
Had settled on the cans.
Their brilliant labels peeped from the weeds,
Like the remains of a charlatan.
A bone reclined against a fence-post
And mouldily congratulated life.
A woman's garter wasted its faded frills
Upon a newspaper argument.
The shipwrecked rancor of bottles and boxes
Was pressed to disfigured complexities.
A smell of torrential asperity
Knew the spirit of the yard.

Contented or incensed,
The wreckage stood in the yard,
One shade below the sardonic.

IMPULSIVE DIALOGUE

Poet

Will you, like other men,
Offer me indigo indignities?

Undertaker

Indigo indignities!
The words are like a mermaid and a saint
Doubting each other's existence with a kiss.

Poet

The words of most men kiss
With satiated familiarity.
Indigo is dark and vehement,
But one word in place of two
Angers barmaids and critics.

Undertaker

Straining after originality
You argue with its ghost!
A simple beauty, like morning
Harnessed by a wide sparkle
And plodding into the hearts of men,
Cannot reach your frantic juggling.

Poet

I can appreciate
The spontaneous redundancy of nature
Without the aid of an echo
From men who lack her impersonal size.

Undertaker

The sweeping purchase of an evening
By an army of stars;
The bold incoherence of love;

The peaceful mountain-roads of friendship —
These things evade your dexterous epigrams!

Poet

A statue, polished and large,
Dominates when it stands alone.
Placed in a huge profusion of statues
Its outlines become humiliated.
Simplicity demands one gesture
And men give it endless thousands.
Complexity wanders through a forest,
Glimpsing details in the gloom.

Undertaker

I do not crave the dainty pleasure
Of chasing ghosts in a forest!
Nor do I care to pluck
Exaggerated mushrooms in the gloom.
I have lost myself on roads
Crossed by tossing hosts of men.
Pain and anger have scorched our slow feet:
Peace has washed our foreheads.

Poet

Futility, massive and endless,
Captures a stumbling grandeur
Embalmed in history.
In my forest you could see this
From a distance and lose
Your limited intolerance.
Simplicity and subtlety
At different times are backgrounds for each other,
Changing with the position of our eyes.
Death will burn your eyes
With his taciturn complexity.

Undertaker

Death will strike your eyes
With his wild simplicity!

Poet

Words are soldiers of fortune
Hired by different ideas
To provide an importance for life
But within the glens of silence
They meet in secret peace. . . .
Undertaker, do you make of death
A puffing wretch forever pursued
By duplicates of vanquished forms?
Or do you make him a sneering King
Brushing flies from his bloodless cheeks?
Do you see him as an unappeased brooding
Walking over the dust of men?
Do you make him an eager giant
Discovering and blending into his consciousness
The tiny parts of his limitless mind?

Undertaker

Death and I do not know each other.
I am the stolid janitor
Who cleans the litter he has left
And claims a fancied payment.

Poet

Come to my fantastic forest
And you will not need to rise
From simple labours, asking death
For final wages.

EMOTIONAL MONOLOGUE

A man is sitting within the enigmatic turmoil of a railroad station. His face is narrow and young, and his nose, lips, and eyes carved to a Semitic sharpness, have been sundered by a bloodless catastrophe. A traveling-bag stands at his feet. Around him people are clutching farewells and shouting greetings. Within him a monologue addresses an empty theatre.

I AM strangling emotions
And casting them into the seats
Of an empty theatre.
When my lifeless audience is complete,
The ghosts of former emotions
Will entertain their dead masters.
After each short act
A humorous ghost will fly through the audience,
Striking the limp hands into applause,
And between the acts
Sepulchral indifference will mingle
With the dust upon the backs of seats.
Upon the stage a melodrama
And a travesty will romp
Against a back-drop of fugitive resignation.
Climax and anti-climax
Will jilt each other and drift
Into a cheated insincerity.
Sometimes the lights will retire
While a shriek and laugh
Make a martyr of the darkness.
When the lights reappear
An actor-ghost will assure the audience
That nothing has happened save

The efforts of a fellow ghost
To capture life again.
In his role of usher
Another ghost will arrange
The lifeless limbs of the audience
Into postures of relief.
Sometimes a comedy will trip
The feet of an assassin,
Declaring that if ghosts were forced
To undergo a second death
Their thinness might become unbearable.
At other times indignant tragedy
Will banish an intruding farce,
Claiming that life should not retain
The luxury of another laugh.
The first act of the play will show
The owner of the theatre
Conversing with the ghost of a woman.
As unresponsive as stone
Solidly repelling a spectral world,
His words will keenly betray
The bloodless control of his features.
He will say: "With slightly lowered shoulders,
Because of a knife sticking in my back,
I shall trifle with crowded highways,
Buying decorations
For an interrupted bridal-party.
This process will be unimportant
To the workshop of my mind
Where love and death are only
Colourless problems upon a chart."
The ghost of the woman will say:
"Your mind is but the rebellious servant
Of sensitive emotions

And brings them clearer dominance."
And what shall I mournfully answer?
I am strangling emotions
And casting them into the seats
Of an empty theatre.

PRONOUNCED FANTASY

A NEGRO girl with skin
As black as a psychic threat,
And plentiful swells of blonde hair,
Sat at a badly tuned piano
And vanquished her fingers upon the keys.
A midnight exultation
Fastened itself on her face,
Quivering over the shrouded prominence
Of her lips and nose.
Her dress was pink and short,
And hung upon her tall, thin body,
Like a lesson in buffoonery.
She lectured her heart on the piano
With violence of minor chords.
Her voice was a prisoner
Whose strong hands turned the bars of his cell
Into musical strings.
Wen' tuh Houston, tuh get mah trunk,
Did'n get mah trunk, but ah got dam' drunk.
Well, ahm satisfi-i-ied
Cause ah gotta be-e-e-ee.
The negro girl turned and cursed
With religious incision
At a parrot in a white spittoon.
He pampered his derision
While she played another tune.
Then he saw her long blonde hair
And paused in the midst of his squawk.

II

I FOUND the negro girl
Walking down a railroad track.
The unconscious humour of sunlight
Disputed the gloom of her skin.
Her gray and dirty clothes
Disgraced the haste of her body.
Her feet and arms were bare
And thin as sensual disappointments.
An egg stood straight upon
The blonde attention of her hair.
The upturned remonstrance of her head
Revealed her balancing effort.
Lacking a more intense food
She dined upon the air
And sang with loosened despair.

*Gonna lay mah head right down upon dat —
Down upon dat railroad track!
Gonna rest mah head right down upon dat railroad track.
An' wen the train goes by — 'm boy —
Ahm gonna snatch it back.*

The negro girl received my gaze
And broke it on her poignant face.
“Why do you carry the egg?” I said.
“If I could only hate it less
I might break it, and undress,”
She answered with motionless lips.

WHEN SPIRITS SPEAK OF LIFE

THREE spirits sit upon a low stone wall placed on the top of a hill. Their figures are gray, with human outlines, and their faces are those of a boy, a woman, and an old man. Light is greeting intimations of evening. The wall, the hill, and the figures exist only to the spirits who have created them.

First Spirit

We have made a wall
And take it gravely.

Second Spirit

The pensive vagary
That led us to return to earth
Welcomes these pretty illusions.
Stone wall, hill, and evening
Become the touch of spice
Precious to our weariness.

Third Spirit

The animated brevity
Of this world is captivating!
We have journeyed inward
To the ever-distant center of life,
Where language is a universe
Seething with variations,
And form becomes the changing warmth
Of wrestling influences;
Where motion is the plunging light of thoughts
Dying upon each other.

First Spirit

We find an incredulous pleasure
In changing from violent influences

To breath that is mutilated with outlines.
With a subtle suspicion, we greet
The tiny fables of our hands and feet.
We take the little blindness of eyes
To reassure ourselves
That the fables will not vanish.
Humorously we trade
Languages, like one who gives a plateau
For a drop of old liquor!

Second Spirit

Once we were germs of thought
Squirming under elastic disguises —
The bank-clerk inscribing tombstones;
The poet playing surgeon to his heart;
The cardinal starving his flesh.
Our bodies were images made by thought
And symbolizing the pain of its birth.
Murder, love, and theft
Were only struggling experiments
Made by germs of thought emerging to form.

Third Spirit

What men call mysticism
Is the lull in which their germ
Of thought compensates itself
By dreaming of a future form.
But when the struggle is resumed,
It often derides its inactivity,
Scorning the brilliant trance of its exhaustion!

First Spirit

And now, three tired spirits,
Seeking a weird trinket of the past,
Have slipped into a replica of birth.

Second Spirit

Because the gliding search of our life
Is lacking in one quality, amusement,
We shall often return
To evenings, men, and walls of stone.

INSANITY

GEROID LATOUR was a lean, grandiose Frenchman whose curly beard resembled a cluster of ripe raspberries. His lips were maroon-colored and slightly distended, as though forever slyly inviting some stubbornly inarticulate thought—as though slyly inviting Geroid Latour. A man's lips and beard are two-thirds of his being, unless he is an anchorite, and even in that case they can become impressively stunted. Geroid Latour was an angel rolling in red mud. From much rolling he had acquired the pert, raspberry beard, struggling lips, and the surreptitious grandeur of a nose, but the plastic grin of a singed angel sometimes listened to his face.

His wife, having futilely tried to wrench his beard off, sought to reach his eyes with a hat-pin.

"This is unnecessary," he expostulated. "Another woman once did it much better with a word."

A plum-colored parrot in the room shrieked: "I am dumb! I am dumb!" Geroid Latour had painted it once, in a sober moment. Geroid and his wife wept over the parrot; slapped each other regretfully; and sat down to eat a pear. A little girl ran into the room. Her face was like a candied moon.

"My mother has died and my father wants a coffin," she said.

Geroid Latour rubbed his hands into a perpendicular lustre—he was a facetiously candid undertaker. He took the hand of the little girl whose face was like a candied moon and they ambled down the street.

"I have lost my friendship with gutters," mused Geroid, looking down as he walked. "They quarrel with bits of orange peel and pins. Patiently they wait for the red rain that men give them every two hundred

years. Brown and red always sweep toward each other. Men are often unknowingly killed by these two huge colours treading the insects upon a path and walking to an ultimate trysting-place.

The little girl whose face was like a molasses crescent cut off one of her yellow curls and hung it from her closed mouth.

"Why are you acting in this way?" asked Geroid.

"It's something I've never done before," she answered placidly.

Geroid stroked his raspberry beard with menacing longing but could not quite induce himself to pull it off. It would have been like cutting the throat of his mistress.

They passed an insincerely littered courtyard, tame beneath its gray tatters, and saw a black cat chasing a yellow cat.

"A cat never eats a cat — goldfish and dead lions are more to his taste," said Geroid. "Indulgently he flees from other cats or pursues them in turn."

"I see that you dislike melodrama," observed a bulbous woman in penitent lavender, who was beating a carpet in the courtyard.

"You're mistaken. Melodrama is a weirdly drunken plausibility and can not sincerely be disliked," said Geroid. "But I must not leave without complimenting your lavender wrapper. Few people have mastered the art of being profoundly ridiculous."

"I can see that you're trying to be ridiculously profound," said the woman as she threw a bucket of stale water at Geroid. He fled down the street, dragging the child with him. They left the cumbersome sterility of the city behind them and passed into the suburbs.

"Here we have a tragedy in shades of naked inertness," said Geroid to the little girl.

"I don't quite understand you," answered the little girl. "I see nothing but scowls and brownness."

A tree stood out like the black veins on an unseen fist. A square house raised its toothless snarl and all the other houses were jealous imitators. Wooden fences crossed each other with dejected, mathematical precision. A rat underneath a veranda scuffled with an empty candy box. The green of dried grasses spread out like poisonous impotence.

"Here is the house where my mother lies dead," said the little girl.

Her father — peace germinating into greasy overalls — came down the steps. His blue eyes were parodies on the sky — discs of sinisterly humourous blue; his face reminded one of a pear that had been stepped on — resiliently flattened.

"I have come to measure your wife for her coffin," said Geroid Latour.

"You'll find her at the bottom of the well in the backyard," answered the man.

"Trying to cheat a poor old undertaker out of his business!" said Latour, waggishly.

"No, I'll leave that to death," said the man. "Come inside and warm your candour."

"No, thank you, shrieks travel faster through the open air," said Geroid, squinting at the man's sportively cerulean eyes.

"Come out to the well and we'll haul her up," said the man.

The little girl darted into the house, like a disappointed hobgoblin, and Geroid Latour followed the man to the well at the rear of the house. Suddenly he saw a mountainous washerwoman dancing on her toes over the black loam. Her sparse grayish black hair flapped behind her like a dishrag and her naked body had the

color of trampled snow. An empty beer-bottle was balanced on her head. She had the face of an old Columbine who still thought herself beautiful.

"A neighbour of mine," said the man in an awed voice. "She was a ballet-dancer in her youth and every midnight she makes my back-yard a theater. In the morning she scrubs my floors. Here, in my back-yard, she chases the phantoms of her former triumphs. Moonlight turns her knee joints into miracles!"

"Ah, from enormous wildness and pretence, squeezed together, comes the little drop of happiness," said Geroid Latour, sentimentally.

"My wife objected to my joining this woman's midnight dance," said the man. "To prevent her from informing the police, I killed her. I could not see a miracle ruined."

"Only the insane are entertaining," answered Geroid. "The egoism of sane people is gruesome — a modulated scale of complacent gaieties — but insane people often display an artificial ego which is divine. The artist, gracefully gesticulating about himself, on his divan, is hideous, but if he danced on a boulder and waved a lilac bough in one hand and a broom in the other, one could respect him."

As Geroid finished talking the mountainous washer-woman drew nearer and stopped in front of the man. Blossoming glints of water dropped from her grayish white skin.

"You haven't killed me yet, my dear husband," she shouted to the man. Then, snatching the beer-bottle balanced on her head she struck at him. Geroid fled to the front gate and sped down the road. Looking back, from a safe distance, he saw the mountainous woman, the man, and the little child earnestly gesticulating in the moonlight.

POETRY

MORNING light anxiously pinched the cheeks of these poplar trees. The silver blood rushed to their faces and they blushed. The garden walls forgot their stolidity for a moment and seemed inclined to leap away, but became sober again, resisting the twinkling trickery of morning light. Airily suspended tales in light and colour, of no importance to philosophers, hung over the scene. Only a snail underneath the trees, steeped in a creeping evening, lived apart from the crisp medley of morning lights. Laboriously, the snail moved through his explanation of the universe. But, to blades of grass, their lives tersely centered in green, the morning was a mysterious pressure.

The morning glowed over the garden like an incoherent rhapsody. It lacked order and thought, and the serious eyes of teachers and jesters would have spurned it. But Halfert Bolin, walking between rows of cold peonies, regarded the morning with harsh approval and spoke.

"You have the brightness and flatness of a distracted virgin but your eyes are mildly opaque. The tinsel swiftness of a courtesan's memoirs is yours but your heart is as shy as the clink of glass. You glow like an incoherent rhapsody over the peonies in this garden!"

A woman whose painted face was a lurid snarl tapped Bolin on the shoulder. Her red hair was brushed upward into a pinnacle of burnished frenzy; her blue serge dress cast its plaintive monotone over the body of a sagging amazon; a pink straw hat dangled from her hand. Bolin allowed his admiration to bow.

"A babyish lisp slipping from you would make your grewsomeness perfect, madame," he said.

"I don't getcha, friend," she responded. "I'm a sporting lady from the roadhouse down the way an' I'm

out for a morning walk. Who planted you here, old duck? ”

“ I’m a cow browsing amidst the peonies,” said Bolin seriously. “ Without a thought, I feed on light and colour.”

“ You don’t look like a cow,” said the woman, dubiously. “ Maybe you’re spoofing me, you funny old turnip! ”

“ No, I only jest with the morning,” Bolin answered, unperturbed. “ It ignores me with soaring colours and I prefer this to the minute antagonisms of human beings. You don’t understand a word I say — you bend beneath tepid apprehension, so I find a pleasure in speaking to you — its like humming a love-song to a mud-turtle.”

“ Don’t get insultin’,” said the woman with disgruntled amazement. “ I think you’re crazy.”

Bolin turned, with a smile like a distant spark, and walked away between the peonies. The woman regarded him a moment, while a fascinated frown battled with her painted face. Then she strode after him and gripped his arm.

“ Hey, watcha leavin’ me for? ” she said in a piteously strident voice.

“ For the peonies in this garden,” answered Bolin, mildly.

“ Listen, don’t get mad at me,” she said. “ I don’t care whether you’re crazy or not. I like your face.”

Bolin gazed at her while sorrow loosened his face and made it glisten spacioisly.

“ Can you become as spontaneously tranquil as these peonies? ” he asked.

The woman tendered him her dazed frown, like an anxious servant.

“ Walk with me and be quiet unless I ask you to speak,” said Bolin with sudden harshness.

Obediently she laid a hand on his arm and they strolled

down the path between the peonies. She sidled along like an inspired puppet — she seemed a doll touched to life by some Christ. Upon her painted face a nun and a violinist grappled tentatively and her lips made a red scarf fallen from the struggle. Bolin left the peonies and wandered down the road. They came upon a boulder clad in an outline of smashed spears. Queen Anne's Lace grew close to its base, like the remnants of some revel.

"This is the head of a philosopher," said Bolin.

The woman jerkily turned her body, while pallid perplexity ate into her paint and made her face narrow.

"You can speak," said Bolin.

"It looks like a rock," she answered in the voice of a child clinking his fetters.

"We have both spoken words," said Bolin mildly.

The shy blindness on her face glided to and fro, like a prisoner. As she strolled with Bolin she still seemed a puppet dragged along the dust of a road by some Christ. Bolin's middle-aged face whistled, with limpid chagrin, to his youth. His high cheek-bones were like hidden fists straining against his sallow skin.

They came upon a dead rabbit stiffening by the roadside.

"Bury him," said Bolin, gravely.

The woman clutched at her habitual self.

"S-a-a-y, what's the idea?" she asked in a shrilly lengthened voice.

"Bury him," repeated Bolin gravely.

With a dazed giggle she picked a dead branch from the ground and jabbed at the loose black loam. Then she gingerly prodded the dead rabbit with the branch, shoving it into the depression she had made. She scooped earth over it with her foot.

"Now we're both crazy," she said uncertainly, and her nervous smile was the juggled wreck of a silver helmet.

"You have buried your meekness," said Bolin, calmly amused. "Now walk beside me and do not speak unless, being brave, you desire to leave me."

The woman stood gaping at him, like a vision poignantly doubting the magician who has created it. Sullenness made her lips straight for a moment, then faded into twitching awe. She slid her arm into his and once more seemed a doll dragged along the dust of a road by some distracted giant. Bolin retraced his steps; he and the woman passed by the garden of cold peonies and came to a bend in the road. Late afternoon blundered sedately through shades of green foliage beneath them. Below the hilltop on which they stood, a barn-like house crouched, its tan cerements repelling the afternoon light.

The woman tapped her chin with two fingers in a drum-beat of reality.

"Gotta get back to work, old dear," she said, amiably squinting at Bolin.

Bolin's sallow face shook once and became chiseled apathy.

"So do I," he answered, his voice like the accidental ring of light metals. "I'm the new waiter Foley hired last week. You've been too busy to notice me much."

For a full minute the woman stood staring at him, her hands upon her hips, her slightly bulging gray eyes like water-drops threatening to roll down her shattered face.

"You're the guy they call Nutty Louie," she said at last, as though confiding a ludicrously startling message to herself.

Then for another full minute she stood staring at him.

"We're bughouse," she said in a mesmerised whisper. "Bughouse."

Bolin walked forward without a word. The woman gaped at him for a moment and then ran after him as she had in the garden of peonies.

RELIGION

ALVIN TOR sat in his floating row-boat and read the Bible. Green waves died upon each other, like a cohesive fantasy. Each small wave rose as high as the other and ended in a swan's neck of white interrogation. Sunlight blinded the water as style dazes the contents of a poem and the blue sky lifted itself to symmetrical stupor. The air fell against one like a soothing religion. The bristling melancholia of pine trees lined the wide river. But Alvin Tor sat in his floating row-boat, reading the Bible. He read the Songs of Solomon, and a sensual pantomime made a taut stage of his face. When not reading the Songs of Solomon he was as staidly poised as a monk's folded arms. He had borrowed the colours of his life from that spectrum of desire which he called God. Different shades of green leaves were, to him, the playful jealousies of a presence; the tossed colours of birds became the ineffably light gestures of a lost poet.

His Swedish peasant's face had singed its dimples in a bit of sophistication but his eyes were undeceived. His heart was a secluded soliloquy transforming the shouts of the world into tinkling surmises. His broad nose and long lips were always at ease and his ruddy skin held the texture of fresh bunting. His eyes knew the unkindled reticence of a rustic boy.

This man of one mood sat in his floating row-boat, reading the Bible. He reached the mouth of the river and drifted out to sea. The sea was a menacing lethargy of rhythm: green swells sensed his row-boat with dramatic leisure. A sea gull skimmed over the water, like a haphazard adventure. Looking up from his Bible Alvin Tor saw the body of a woman floating beside his boat. With one jerk his face swerved into blankness. The tip

of his tongue met his upper lip as though it were a fading rim of reality. The fingers of one hand distressed his flaxen hair.

The woman floated on her back with infinite abandon. Little ripples of green water died fondling her body. The green swells barely lifting her were great rhythms disturbed by an inert discord. Sunlight, fumbling at her body, relinquished its promiscuous desires and became abashed. *Her wet brown hair had a drugged gentility: its short dark curls hugged her head with despondent understanding. Her face had been washed to an imperturbable transparency: it had the whiteness of reclining foam overcast with a twinge of green — the sea had lent her its skin.* Her eyes were limply unworried and violated to gray disintegration. In separated bits of outlines the remains of thinly impudent features were slipping from her face. The bloated pity of black and white garments hid her lean body.

As Alvin Tor watched her, tendrils of peace gradually interfered with the blankness on his face. His lips sustained an unmediated repose. A sensitive compassion dropped the sparks of its coming into his eyes. His clothes became a jest upon an inhuman body; the earth of him effortlessly transcended itself in the gesture of his arm flung out to the woman.

“Impalpable relic of a soul, the spirit you held must have severed its shadow to preserve you forever from the waves,” he said, his face blindfolded with ecstasy, “for you grasp the water with immortal relaxation. You are not a body — you are beauty receding into a resistless seclusion.”

“Kind fool, musically stifling himself in a row-boat — made kind by the desperate tenderness of a lie — you are serenading the chopped bodies of your emotions,” said the woman.

Alvin Tor's face cracked apart and the incredulously hurrying ghost of a child nodded a moment and was snuffed out.

"Mermaid of haunting despondency, what are you?" he asked.

"I am the symbol of your emotions," the woman answered.

"I made them roses stepped upon by God," said Alvin Tor.

"I am the symbol of your emotions," said the woman.

Alvin Tor heavily dropped his raised arm, like a man smashing a trumpet. Restless white hands compressed the ruddy broadness of his face. The woman slid into the green swells like exhausted magic. Alvin Tor rowed back to the river.

II

A WOMAN lifted the green window-shades in her room and resentfully blinked at the sun-plastered clamours of a street. She turned to the bed upon which another woman reclined.

"Say, wasn't that a nutty drunk we had last night?" she said. "Huggin' a Bible and ravin' about waves and mermaids and a lot of funny stuff!"

She dropped the green shade and stood against it a moment in the smouldering gloom of the room. *Her brown hair had a drugged gentility: its short dark curls hugged her head with despondent understanding. Her face had been washed to an imperturbable transparency: it had the whiteness of reclining foam overcast with a twinge of green — the sea had lent her its skin.*

SCIENTIFIC PHILOSOPHY

THE concentrated vehemence of a mountain halted against the sky in a thin line of thwarted hostility.

A waterfall hurdled its crazed parabola between gray rocks, flying into a stifled scream of motion far below. When the pine trees moved a mathematician solved his problems, and his acrid exultation hypnotized the air. The pungent truculence of earth that had never been stepped on raised its brown shades.

Eric Lane stopped in an alcove of pine trees; lifted a pack from his back; pitched his tent; and broke dead pine branches across his knee. There were scars on his face where philosophies had broken and died and the beaming redundancy of one that survived. For Eric believed that the visible and audible surface of man's conduct and dreams, when interpreted and compared, could reveal his frustrated hungers. Metaphysics, to him, was a beggar rattling his chains into insincere victories of sound—a beggar painting seraphs upon the strained finality of his brain.

Eric looked up from his task of breaking dead pine branches. A first shade of twilight climbed the mountain, like a dazed negro runner. The mountain impassively confessed that its vehemence had been a lie. It met the sky with an immense line of collapsed reticence. The waterfall became the squirming of a white hermit who finds a black stranger invading his cell. Twilight was a body gradually returning to the festooned skeletons of the pine trees. The rocks were enticed into attitudes—one was a giant fondling the spear that had wounded him; another curved over like a gray serf who had broken his back. Eric stared at a huge rock standing on the mountainside and outlined against the distant base of a second mountain. It held the tensely em-

balmed profile of a woman. Her rigidly woebegone features had withdrawn from some devil's cliff of desire; they made a line of incomplete crucifixion. Her hidden eyes germinated into ghouls stealthily absorbing the gray harvest of her face. Designed by a shattered surmise her face retreated from the valley. Her forehead was like a sword cracked in the middle; her nose and lips were the remains of an autopsy on emotion. Demons and virgins had gained one grave in the grayness assailing her face.

Eric regarded her at first with a celebrating scepticism; then sallowness slowly marked his face into a hanging scroll of terror. Lightness vanished from his black hair and it became a charred crown. He tottered three steps in the direction of the rock-face and then, with unannounced dexterity, a smile revived his face. The diminutive city of his mind had sent its lord-mayor to restore him. Eric returned to his task of breaking dead pine branches. The diminutive city of his mind sent slender pæans into electric threads. Eric kindled the branches into a fire, and a carnival of flames pirouetted into startled death. Eric stretched his arms out, like a concubine stroking the walls of her black tent, and his face became idly immobile. Then he altered completely, in the leap of a moment, as though slipping from a loose costume with infinite ease. His face stiffened into the unearthly equilibrium of thought witnessing the torture of emotion. The fire, to him, became a gaudy funeral-pyre. When sleep finally interfered with his face he dropped slowly to the ground, like satiated revenge.

When he awoke, morning assaulted the gaunt scene with unceremonious clarity. The mountain became a senseless giant; the waterfall changed to a commonplace ribbon: and the pine trees blended into the lethargy of dwarfs. The gray rock on the mountain was still gashed

into the face of a woman but her outlines were those of a transfigured virago. Eric strapped on his pack; gazed down at the rock, with the smile of a merchant emerging from drunken memories, and strode toward it. When he reached it he hammered away a flat fragment, for remembrance, and returned to the mountain path, with an expressionless face.

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Eric Lane ended his lecture on scientific philosophy and tapped a desecrating hand, for a moment, on the profile that had told me a story during his talk. He had left the mountain pass but he was unaware of that. He would have laughed at the idea, like a beggar who rattles his chains into insincere victories of sound. Of that, too, he was unaware.

ART

MRS. CALVIN and Mrs. Kildrick stood on opposite sides of a back-yard fence. Around them the romping improbabilities of early spring were dispersed amidst the sour reality of suburban houses. Pale green surrounded the small, square abodes, like an impish irrelevance. Each house carried a shade of dull green, brown and red, and these shades fitted into each other and made a meekly repressed story. Cinder side-walks stretched in front of the houses — remorsefully dry remains of fire, sacrificing themselves to occasional feet. The entire scene was an unconscious reflection of the minds of Mrs. Calvin and Mrs. Kildrick, standing on opposite sides of a back-yard fence.

These women held an unblossoming stoutness, like buds that had swollen enormously but failed to open. Their gray muslin wrappers were too undistinguished to be shrouds and sepulchrally flirted with red ruffles. Mrs. Calvin had an implacably round face and it reminded one of a merchant scolding an infant. Mrs. Kildrick's face was round, but softer, like that of a frustrated milk-maid.

"You ought to see her room," said Mrs. Kildrick. "It looks like a drunkard's confession, as my husband says, 'the funniest clay figgers and paintins you ever saw.'"

"I couldn't believe it when you told me," said Mrs. Calvin, "the poor dear looks so-o respectable — what can be ailing her?"

"She calls it her a-art," said Mrs. Kildrick. "Well, as my husband does say, we should pity those whose minds are a little bit cracked!"

The ladies continued to adulterate the wanness of their doubts and the sunlight continued its blunt rummaging

way among the rubbish-cans and fences. The afternoon jovially began to change its glowing costume for a pretended death scene, studying and lingering over gray effects. Just as its melancholy was heaving toward a climax Helma Solbert strode up the cinder walk leading to Mrs. Kildrick's abode.

She was a woman of thirty with a body whose dying youth amply derided middle-age. Her ovally impertinent face spoke to the first warnings of dissolution and told them that their coming had been ill-advised. Weary but tenaciously merry, her gray eyes were close to those of one who has made the dagger in his side a cajoling saint. Her little nose was a straight invitation to her widely ripe lips and they turned upward as if to reach it. She wore a blue serge suit that was an incongruous commonplace but did not quite succeed in effacing her. Round and black, her small hat rested lightly upon her brown and abundant hair, like an inconspicuous accident. She entered her room, abandoned her hat and coat, and measured herself in a mirror as though encouraging a stranger to play with his burden. Then a smile of delighted futility plucked at her lips and she closed her eyes to avoid robbing the stranger of his forlornly puzzling charm. With her eyes still closed she walked to a couch and stretched out upon it, and everything vanished from her face except its flesh. Framed canvases hung upon the yellow plaster walls of the room and each frame had a shape that obviously failed to harmonize with the painting it enclosed. Unconscious of the stiff challenges holding them, the canvases stood in the fading afternoon light, like a disconnected fable. One above the couch represented a small red apple split by an enormous dark green hatchet. The hatchet had driven one of its points into a wooden table and slanted steeply upward, its slender handle rising to an upper corner of the painting. Two

little hemispheres of red and white apple cowered on each side of the hatchet's blade. The visible, level top of the table was dark brown and terminated against a feebly violet background. The following sentimental words were painted in black letters high upon the violet.

"The hatchet struck at weak beauty, but —"

The canvas was enclosed by a round frame painted in a shade of apple red. Each canvas in the room held the first line of a poem that was completed by the colored forms of the painting or a last line preceded by visual symbols. With the air of a fanatic whose blood had tightened into loops of fire that cast their sheen upon his voice, Helma would say to rare visitors viewing her paintings:

"By blending into one, art, literature and painting can lose their deficiencies and gain perfection. I am merely experimenting with the crude promise of this future union."

On a canvas at the opposite side of the room a huge complexly broken arrow emerged from a pale red sky. The black arrow pieces were dotted with tiny yellow, indigo and pink birds. Dark red lips, each twisted to a different expression, stood in the corners of the canvas. Extending down the left side of the painting the following line was written in black against a strip of bare canvas.

"Thus I spoke one afternoon, because —"

Helma Solbert rose from her couch, lit a candle and stood before the arrow-framed painting, gazing at it with a pierced and subtly colorless face. Then she turned on an electric light and its artificial stare, in an instant, brought her an obliterating self-consciousness. With the bearing of one who impudently walks to a gruesome sacrifice she disappeared behind a lavender screen in a corner of the room and fried her evening meal. When she

emerged from the screen her face had once more perfected its defensive impertinence. Even in her sleep some hours later her features retained the blurred suspicion of a smile that stayed like a lurking sentinel.

The following morning she was too ill to rise and Mrs. Kildrick summoned a doctor. He was a portly man with a steeply florid face and a dominating beard that had the color of wet sand. While he was in the midst of examining his patient she rose to a sitting posture and stared at him.

"You're what I tried to hide from; why have you come to plague me?" she said, loudly.

MUSIC

OLGA CRAWFORD fiercely divorced herself from all expression as she maltreated her violin at the Symphony Moving Picture Theater. In its average moments of vivacity her face was a dissembling friar who brightly listened to her sensual lips, but as she played, her face became an emptiness profaned by the wail of her instrument. Her arms desecrated their errands and her head sloped into an unwilling counterfeit of wakefulness. On the screen above her men and women frantically guarded their hallucination of life and a decrepit plot vaguely imitated love and bravery. Rows of faces stolidly massacred the gloom of the theater and stood like a regiment waiting, without thought, for some command. But when one looked closer three expressions broke from the stolidity, as three major harmonies might charm the mind of a composer. The first was a somnolent elation — the mien of a hungry person dozing over some crumbs he is almost too tired to eat. Shop-girls, with pertly robbed faces, became victims of this expression, although an occasional man with lips like determined fiascoes also attained it. The second was a tightly laced impatience — the enmity of one whose feelings have been openly censored. Fat women with flabbily throttled faces and glistening men with bodies like bulky scandals received this expression. The third was a seraphic stupor — the demeanour of one whose formless delights have benignly exiled thought.

To Olga these people gathered into a blanched duplicate of life — a remote comedy that made the monotone of her evening self-conscious. If they had excoriated her she could have forgotten them, but their weighty indifference raped her attention. The dryly sinuous smell of their clothes pelted her like a sandstorm: the little,

desperate perfumes they used scarcely survived. Their eyes were scores of tinily inviting bulls-eyes never reached by her hurried arrows.

She finished her playing; the people shuffled out like an apologetic delusion. Ferenz, the pianist, a cowed Toreador of a man, gave his browns and blacks a ponderous recreation.

"Nother grind passed," he said in a thick voice corrupted by pity. "Hand over them sheets, Joe."

Joe, fat as a gourmand's revery, handed him the sheets. The features on Joe's face were as abject as crumbs on a shallow plate. The Symphony Theater orchestra flaunted its yawning moroseness a little while longer and filed through a low exit.

Olga's feet tamely saluted the crowded street-pavements. To her the crowd was an approach to the theater audience — a brisk indifference that made her eyes neglected spendthrifts. Its motion alone gave it a flickering mastery: if it had paused, for an hour, it would have become inane. The choked tirade of rolling street-cars and automobiles would have ended in a dismal curtain of silence — the chariots would have changed to mere hardware puzzled by the moonlight. A tall woman, encouraging the gorgeous tumult of her dresses, would have stood like a cluttered farce. The little pagan symmetries of her face, gaudily tantalizing when merely glimpsed, would have met in a kittenish argument. A tall man, blondly governing his polished discrepancies, would have changed to a stagnant buffoon. An old man, chiding his corpulent effulgence with endearments of motion, would have altered to a maudlin exaggeration.

Olga reached her room and summoned the meaningless stare of an electric light. Upon her short body plumpness and slenderness bargained with each other, and the result was a suave arbitration. Her dark green skirt and

white waist made a subdued affirmation: their coloured lines did not emphasise the lurking essences of her body. Surrounded by black disturbances of hair the sardonic parts of her face were molested by sentimental inconsistencies. Her nose was a salient inquisition but her full mouth had a negroid flash; her chin was coldly bellicose but her cheeks were softly turned. Beneath her moderate brow her blue and white eyes were related to glaciers.

She sat at an upright piano and trifled with the keys, almost inaudibly. It was midnight and an acrimonious man in the next room often remonstrated with the wall when her piano conversed too impulsively. Since she was an unknown composer the moment is appropriate for an attack upon her obscurity. Her music was the compact Sunday of her life. There she deserted the trite miserliness of narrative and definite concepts and designed a spacious holiday. Her notes loafed and romped into inquisitive patterns and were only intent upon shifting their positions. Thought and emotion presided over the experimental revels of their servants but issued no narrow commands and became broadly festive guidances. In her music the rules of harmony were neither neglected nor worshipped. When they felt an immense friendliness for the romping of her notes they made a natural background: otherwise, they did not intrude. Her music did not strive to suggest or interpret concepts and pictures nor did it salaam to emotions. All three were seconds rising and dying as her sounds changed their places. The first few notes of each composition were repeated above as the title, not because they dominated the piece, but merely as a means of identification.

In her wanly nondescript room which she did not own, from midnight to dawn, this woman whose face was a bewilderment of contrasts, sat furnishing the momentum

for a reveling deluge of music. But an evening decided to interrupt this performance.

Olga stood in the shop of a neighborhood cobbler. He was a frayed apologia, with a scant distraction of gray hair and a dustily crushed face.

"When you play violin in theater I have heard," he said. "Maybe you would like to hear my boy. He is only eleven but he play almost so good as you. Maybe you will tell him how he can play better."

Olga followed him to the rear of his shop, with a surface purchase of pity. He trotted out his son, a comedy in light browns relieved by the smothered fixity of gray eyes. With whining precision the boy twisted his way through Massenet's *Elegy*, defending each sliding note with his arms and his head. The syrupy embrace of a world stirred upon his acceptant face; the whites of his eyes hovered against Olga's face, like a writhing request. In the midst of his playing she turned and fled, terror-stricken, down the street.

ETHICS

ETHEL CURN was an acrobat with Hearn's Twelve Ring Circus, but her bones were riveted together by a precariously brittle dignity as she paraded down the field of daisies to a cliff at the edge of the sea. Perhaps acrobats walk stiffly during their leisure hours because their bodies become ascetic when released from an unreal, sensual agility. Ethel Curn sometimes stooped to pick a daisy and her body received motion in a deliberately ungallant manner, as though greeting an unwelcome mistress. Her face was an indiscreetly torn screen for emotions that had been dead for many years; her low forehead broke into the tinily pointed lustres of her features; her body was as slim as a symbolised cricket's lament. She crossed the field of daisies intensely dissolved into a forethought of afternoon and stood underneath a tree at the edge of the cliff. As she leaned against the tree it seemed as if a giant had courteously lent his umbrella to a rudely unresponsive dwarf. Below her the sea grunted with automatic fury and receded, like a pleased actor. Winds threw their weird applause against the blue and gray rocks. The calmer air underneath the tree was not unlike a distressed mind caught between the noises.

Ethel Curn seated herself beneath the tree and read a paper-bound novel entitled, "The Fate of Eleanor Martin," but the sea and the rocks interfered too effectively with Eleanor and her pretended life slid into the reality at the foot of the tree, while Ethel peered aggressively down at the waves. A whim winked its narcotic eye at her mind — the waves became fellow-workers and she was an audience critically examining their turns. "A little higher with that green somersault! Come on, old chicken, you can do a longer slide if you try!" her

mind cried amiably. Lost in the syncopation of admiration her body swayed with the waves and her brown hair went adventuring. Then, like a jilted servant, her mood ran from her, brandishing its abashed haste over her body. Sorrow struck her face with a crazily gay second that extinguished her eyes. Her body improvised its lines into a wilted sexlessness that made her black skirt and pink waist mysterious. The torture of a lost love had feasted upon her flesh and reduced it to an abstraction. Hearn, the circus-master, presided over the feast like a chilly urbane magician. Without a trace of sensual longing she recalled his little black moustache, standing like a curt intrigue over his lips, and the way in which it had bitten into her mouth became the unreal memento of something she had never possessed. Like all women gazing back at a departed love, she felt a swindled poverty that could not quite decide whether it had once owned wealth or not. This feeling translated itself in exclamatory vowels that could not find the consonants of her past passion. She smiled like a bedraggled, masquerading tragedy. It takes women years to perfect this masquerade, but they win a distracted pleasure that guards them from haggling memories. To generalize about women is to broaden our hope that one woman may serve for the rest. Philosophers disappointed in love often do this, though the man on the street is a fairly adept mimic. Ethel Curn's bosom lightly scolded her pink waist and her poignantly devilish smile almost persuaded her that it was real. All the tragedy on her face spent itself in a distressed question. In unison with this proceeding a perturbed monologue within her addressed her vanity which was silkily perched upon an emotional balcony.

"Hearn treated me white — blue garters with a real diamond in the center — he never smiled when he kissed

me — God, why couldn't I keep him? — He stayed with me a year and there's not a woman in the troupe who's had him more than a month — he's a lying rat, but he never smiled when he kissed me — I wonder whether he'd smile if I slit his throat? — what did I ever see in that fat face — he'll be a joke in a few years — they all throw you down unless you get in ahead of them — If I broke a bottle against his mug I'd only make him happy — it had blue silk tassles and he paid three hundred for it — I drank too much — blue silk tassles — He's better than most of them — I knew what he wanted and I'm bawling him out because he got it — He treated me white — blue silk garters with real diamonds that would make the Queen of England wink —”

The devilishly poignant smile and the monologue met each other within her, while fleeing back to their graves, and their unpremeditated clash illuminated the renunciation upon her face. She looked into her upturned, yellow turban as though it held elusive dregs. Brooding experimented with her head and suddenly threw it to the ground, dissatisfied. She lay there like the impoverished effigy of a far off love — her black skirt revealed her slim legs, with gloomy discourtesy, and her fluffy pink waist gave its babyish sympathy to the sharpness of her back. Her slender but muscular arms, stretching over the grass, were senseless branches touching the shoulders of the armless effigy. The wind trifled with her loose brown hair and incited it to ironically flitting imitations of life. Dead thoughts and emotions united upon her hidden face and gripped it with decayed finesse. She rested, perilously unconcerned, upon the sloping edge of the cliff. Suddenly, in a sibilant prank, the earth fled beneath her body and she disappeared.

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They knelt around her prostrate figure hugged by the pale blue indelicacy of tights and the scant impudence of her yellow bodice. High above her a little wooden board dangled helplessly from a long wire, while another wire hung loosely above it. She opened her eyes and stared, with a lustreless disbelief, at the people who were like a tension ready to snap.

"Damn him, he did me dirty!" she cried to the amazed, painted faces above her.

HISTORY

SUNLIGHT stuck to the gray floor like curdled honey and clung to the black wall like visible fever on the breast of a savage. This contradiction gave a fugitive radiance to the room in which King Ferdinand stood, moulding figures of happiness. On sunless days the room was a depressed insult to his rejoicing, forcing it into adroit retorts. He had made this chamber a necessary enemy.

As he moulded his figures of happiness, his wife stood beside him, ready with colors.

"You have almost finished this half-pyramid of eyes emerging from a flat surface and ending against a vertical wall," she said, as though the sound of her words made their obviousness subtle. "What color shall I use to excite your design?"

King Ferdinand turned to her, like a blind man peering into fantastically returning sight. Creative absorption had ruffled his middle-aged face into an ageless insurrection, but when he spoke a wrinkled order once more reigned beneath the granite lull of his forehead.

"Give each eye a different shade of color and, for the wall, make a blue of inhuman brightness: a blue that has swallowed a constellation and defies night," he said. "This form symbolises my last happiness, wherein the clashing sequences of my life have been smashed to a challenging glare. I have become immortal until I voluntarily tender my immortality to death, if he takes it."

The wrinkles on King Ferdinand's cheeks ascended to a sentence of belief hacked upon his forehead. His broadly cumbersome face shrunk to a lighter scope and his red moustache shone like a coal of expectation. His wife played with her dark green gown as though it were re-

laxed gaiety. Her body, like a plump blunder, ended in the deft recklessness of her head; the high amber of her face raised its slightly turned lines of brooding abandon. She looked at her husband as though she considered his flesh an unimportant tragedy calmed by his words.

The smell of listening earth drifted through a window and bird-cries violated the air, like expiring emotions. King Ferdinand stood in the manner of one to whom motion has become a dim travesty, and the blood in his veins was a prisoned resonance. His folded arms were weighted in a marble posture beneath his long sleeves. Queen Muriel touched his arm and gave him life. She led him to a corner of the room and unveiled a small figure, and her hands were pliant consummations.

"My first happiness," she said, in a voice of climbing distinctness. They carried the figure to the light. Almost as slim as a personified plant-stem, a conventionalised monk grew straight from the center of two lean hands cupped into the semblance of a flower-pot. The hands met each other in an effortless tenderness; the thinly high monk bore the suggestions of hood and cassock and his face wore a look of indistinct triumph.

"And so I like to believe that your happiness has grown uncertainly from the rarely caught touch of my hands," she said.

The door of the room opened and two men strode in. One of them curved upward into pompous impatience. The tight inquisitiveness of a gaudy uniform revealed his tall body. His face was like an expansive fallacy — large rolls of flesh indecisively interrogated the thin slant of his nose and slid into the refuge of his brown beard. The second man was waspishly abbreviated and clad in mincing castrations of color. His tinily sharp face suggested a soulless beetle.

"Have you come, as usual, to bestow your explosive

admiration on my figures? ” said King Ferdinand to the man whose face resembled a redundant mistake.

“ Three men of your guard will murder you, with restrained admiration, tomorrow noon,” answered the other man, in whose voice a sneer and apprehension were partners in a minuet. “ You will be killed on the palace steps and the cheers of a huge audience will make death’s leer articulate to you. While you have taken the role of a hermit in an aesthetic petticoat your friends have been arranging a last happiness for you. You are considered an imbecile who paints pretty figures with the blood of his country.”

The flashing hardnesses of a wintry repose assaulted King Ferdinand’s face.

“ My brothers are quite willing to use this blood as an unsolicited rouge for the lips of their mistresses,” he answered in a tone of remotely amused reproach. “ I have not assailed my subjects with taxes or led them to wars and that has been a serious error. They are probably in the position of a man with his chains removed, who is angry because he has forgotten how to dance! ”

The acridly shortened man spoke.

“ When you are dead, sire, your brothers will gamble for your throne by throwing roses at your head. He who first succeeds in striking your bulging eyes, will win.”

“ Death does not like to be made a cheated jester,” said King Ferdinand. “ He will doubtless devise a better joke for my winning brother.”

Queen Muriel, whose face had grown old with choked disdain, stepped forward.

“ Now that your shrewd bantering has made itself sufficiently nude, tell us why you have come,” she said.

The tall man, who carried with him the air of an animated mausoleum, spoke.

"Today I saw an old libertine tottering down the boulevard. Glancing to his feet he spied a lily, clipped and fresh. He sidled blithely to the edge of the walk to avoid stepping on the flower. There is little pleasure, after all, in flattening a child from another world. . . . My carriage will take you to the frontier, tonight."

"My caprices have never been able to strut gorgeously because they hold a sincere sympathy for motion," said King Ferdinand, still mechanically jesting. His hand rose to one cheek as though signaling for a friendly trance and his eyes closed unceremoniously.

"We will take your carriage," he said in the voice of an abstracted tight-rope walker.

The two men tilted their gaudiness into imperceptible bows and departed. King Ferdinand and his wife stood staring at each other as though their bodies were teasing curtains. Then, without remembering what had occurred, they let gay words poke each other and began to discuss colors for the monk's figure rising from cupped hands and blossoming into indistinct triumph.

That night their carriage stopped upon a hilltop and they were killed by three men. One of the three had a thin nose and a brown beard — the tight inquisitiveness of a bright uniform revealed his tall body. Among historians he was to be noted as the man who killed an imbecile king and led his country to glory and prosperity.

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

CARL DELL and Anita Starr were speaking of a dead woman who had influenced their eyes. She had also refined their heads to a chill protest. Their faces, involved and disconsolate, had not solved her absence, and their voices were freighted with a primitive martyrdom. Carl was fencing with the end of his youth. His body held that impenetrable cringing which pretends to ignore the coming of middle age and is only betrayed by rare gestures. He was tall, with a slenderness that barely escaped being feminine. The upper part of his face was scholarly and the lower part roguish, and the two gave him the effect of a sprite who has become erudite but still retains the memory of his former identity. His protruding eyes were embarrassed, as though someone behind them had unexpectedly pushed them from a refuge. With immense finesse they apologised for intruding upon the world. It is almost tautology to say that they were gray. His small brown moustache had a candidly misplaced air as it touched the thin bacchanale of his lips. It was a mourner at the feast.

Anita Starr's form would have seemed stout but for the sweeping discipline of its lines, but this careful suppression ended in a riot when it came to her face. Her face was a small, lyrical revel that had terminated in a fight. Her nose and chin were strident but her cheeks and mouth were subtly unassuming. Her blue eyes brilliantly and impartially aided both sides of the conflict. Glistening spirals of reddish brown hair courted her head.

Sitting in the parlor of the Starr home Anita and Carl spoke of a dead woman who had influenced their eyes. It was two A. M. and the atmosphere resembled a disillusioned reminiscence: still and heavy. They had

talked about this dead woman throughout the evening, welcoming any sound that might surprise her profile into life. When alive she had been the chanting whirlpool of their existences, and when she died sound ceased for them. Their voices became mere copies of its past reign.

"Because I loved her any common pebble became a chance word concerning her and flowers were enthusiastic anecdotes of her presence," said Carl.

For an hour he had been breaking his love into insatiable variations — one who seduces the fleeting expressions of a past torture.

"She may have been an august vagabond from another planet — a planet where loitering is a solemn profession," said Anita. "Even when she performed a menial task she awed it with her thoughtful reluctance. Like a fitful gleaner she crept through bare fields of people, accepting their bits of laughter and refusal. When she met us she stepped backward, as from a tempting unreality, and knocked against death."

Carl sat, like a groveling fantasy weary of attempting to capture a genuine animation, but Anita had forced herself into a tormented erectness. The clock struck three. Without a word or glance in each other's direction they left their chairs, turned out the lights, and ascended the stairway, Carl slightly in advance. They halted at the first landing and faced each other with the uncomplaining helplessness of people suddenly scalded by reality.

"In the morning we will eat oranges from a silver dish and glibly cheat our emotions," said Carl.

"This deftly impolite proceeding never stops to ask our consent," said Anita in a voice whose lethargy barely observed a satirical twinkle.

Another word would have been a ridiculous impro-

priety. They parted and entered their rooms. Flower scents filtered through Carl's open window, like softly dismayed sins and the cool repentance of a summer night glided into his room upon a pathway of moonlight. For a while he sat absent-mindedly burnishing the knives that had divided his evening. After he had undressed he fell upon his bed like one hurriedly obliterating an ordeal. His consciousness played with a black hood; then a crash mastered the room and the door swung open. His blanched face paid a spasmodic tribute to the sound and his grey eyes greeted the darkness as though it were an advancing mob. With a strained stoicism he waited for a repetition of the sound. The moments were sledge-hammers fanning his face with their close passage. Then his bed weirdly meddled with his body and became a light cradle rocked by some arrogant hand. The darkness tingled lifelessly, like an electrocuted man.

Carl's waiting began to feel sharply disgraced and his senses planned a revolt. He tried to rise to a sitting posture but his body insulted his desire. At this point the darkness softened to the disguised struggle of a woman striving to reach him. The significance of this cast an impalpable but potent consolation upon the straining of his chained body. The rocking of his bed measured a powerfully cryptic welcome and he tried to decipher it with the beat of his heart. Each of its syllables became the cadenced impact of another person against a toughly pliant wall. His body demolished its tenseness and pressed a refrain into the swaying bed. He decorated the darkness with the crisp flight of his voice.

"Perish upon the turmoil of each day and make it inaudible, but let the night be our hermitage," he cried to a dead woman. As though replying, the rocking of his bed gradually lessened and the darkness became an opaque farewell. He turned to the shaft of moonlight

which was tactfully intercepting the floor of his room; it had the unobtrusive intensity of a melted Chinaman. For hours he gave it his eyes and dimly contradicted it with his heart. When the dawn made his room aware of its limitations, he closed his eyes.

At the breakfast table he and Anita greeted each other with a worn brevity: their eyes found an empty solace in the white tablecloth and their minds felt a bright impotence, like beggars idling in the sun. For a while the tinkle of their spoons amiably pardoned their constraint, but Anita finally spoke with the staccato of one who snaps unbearable thongs.

"She came to me last night. I heard a sound like a huge menace stumbling over a chair. The door opened and the darkness grew as heavy as dead flesh. My bed swayed with the precision of a grieving head."

Carl's face broke and gleamed like a soft ground flogged by sudden rain.

"The same things happened to me," he said in the voice of a child wrestling with a minor chord.

They sat heavily disputing each other with their eyes.

"Did you lie afterwards, censuring the moonlight?" asked Anita.

Carl nodded. Anita's mother majestically blundered into the room. Exuberantly substantial, with the face of a child skillfully rebuked by an elderly masquerade, she flattered a chair at the table.

"Wasn't that a terrible storm we had last night," she babbled. "The rain kept me awake for hours — I'm such a light sleeper, you know. I do hope you children managed to rest."

LOVE

THE night received the moonlight in the manner of a sophisticated braggart who slaps the face of an old, impassive man. Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor observed this illusion and painted it upon one of the lanterns lighting a little party within her heart. The guests at the party, fat sophists and slatterns in gay, patched clothes, gathered around the lantern and felt relieved at the impersonal novelty of its decoration. If Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor had been a philosopher or a scientist she would have changed the night to an unseen background, or a chemical diagram; she would have ignored the pleading of her heart for pictorial distraction. But since she was a society-woman, tired of sensual toys and a mental twilight, she welcomed the night as her first effectual lover. Sitting in the garden of her country home she could see the lighted windows of her crowded ballroom, and hear the saccharine pandemonium of a jazz orchestra. The noise reminded her of a middle-aged roué, snickering as he rolled his huge dice while gambling for a new mistress. She felt glad that her new lover, the night, did not seek to court her with such a blustering clatter.

The night was incredibly sophisticated but held the pungently awkward body of a youth, crashing against trees and bushes. This mixture pierced Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor and slid far beneath those sensual routines which are the delight of psycho-analysts — slid to a depth where aesthetic passion slays the flesh and blends it into a sexless potency. She felt a sense of bodiless conflagration striding with wide steps beside the night. When the limitless glow died within her, she glanced down and found that she was naked. The complicated shrewdness of her clothes had disappeared.

By this time she had ceased to be Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor — she had become an expectant novice in a new world, and even the jazz music and ballroom laughter had changed to the mumbled rumours of a past existence. Therefore her nakedness failed to disconcert her. She touched her shoulder, with a gesture of matter-of-fact congratulation, and loosened her hair to rid herself of a last dab of incongruity. Then she rose from the stone bench and walked down a pathway leading to the great lake that bounded one side of her country estate. She felt the powerful and sober curiosity of one who has decided to become a recluse and examines the deserted possibilities of his roofless plateau. She reached a high bluff rising over the placid vanity of the huge lake, combing its bluish black hair with moonlight. Suddenly she became aware of a figure standing beside her. She turned with a gasp of strangled aloofness. The ethereal composure of her small face, defended by moonlight, sheered into an ebony cast of hermit-like annoyance. But when the color and outlines of the figure shrunk within her eyes, her face changed again. An astounded immersion crowned her head, tugging at her short nose, straightening her thick lips, and cleaving her gray eyes. The slightly deteriorated slenderness of her short body lowered a bit toward the earth, not from fear but because of a weakening incredulity. The figure before her was that of a sexless human being, small and slim of statute, nude, and hued with an inhumanly concentrated black. The head held large eyes that shone like metaphysical diamonds, as though ten thousand stars were carousing together, in a realm of compressed light. The figure spoke to Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor, and its voice seemed thrown forth by the rays from its eyes. The voice was distinct and subdued.

"You are not a hermit who has turned a garden into a solitary castle," said the figure.

"What am I?" asked Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor.

"Your mind and heart are no longer clad in their heavy mirages of love, fear, and sleep," said the figure. "The surface pictures have gone and the twin bazaars of your heart and mind are exchanging a long-deferred greeting. Within the now mingled bazaars emotions and thoughts have become friends and sell each other endless variations in color, light, and form. I am the being who rules this proceeding."

"Have you a name?" asked Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor, using the unashamed naïveté of a child.

"Men call me Aesthetics," answered the figure. "In my weakest form I make the eyes of the shop-girl hesitate a bit, as she views an unusually gaudy sunset. In my strongest manifestations I help poets and artists to contradict their personal lives. But these are merely my outward indications. I line the hearts and minds of all human beings, often remaining within them, unfelt, until they die. In rare cases such as yours the mirages hiding and dividing me are slain, and I clap my hands, sending motion to the twin bazaars of heart and mind."

"What caused me to uncover you within myself?" said Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor.

"You yielded to a whim and made the night your lover. Dissatisfied with the loves and fears he found within you, the night threw them aside, one by one, thus slaying the mirages that hid me. Your other lovers of the past were content with more material gifts and did not seek to uncover you."

"I am bare now. What will you do with me?" said Mrs. Robert Calvin Taylor. The figure laid a hand upon her shoulder. His eyes burnt her to a petal of ashes that fell down between them.

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Mr. Robert Calvin Taylor stood over the form of his young wife, who sat slouched down upon a stone bench within their garden. He shook her shoulder, lightly. She uttered a perturbed mumble and did not raise the head resting upon one of her arms. The moonlight fell upon the silken complexities of her dress.

“Poor Dot, I warned her not to take a third glass,” he muttered to himself as he raised her in his arms and staggered down the garden pathway.

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